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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 002679

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/09/2033
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [KOLY](#) [IN](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: TIBET: TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND TIGHT SECURITY IN
AMDO REGION

REF: A. BEIJING 1513
[1](#)B. CHENGDU 135
[1](#)C. BEIJING 983
[1](#)D. OSC/FBIS CPP20080323338009

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Ben Moeling. Reason
s 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Despite pronouncements from authorities in Beijing that life has returned to normal in ethnic Tibetan areas of China, travel restrictions for foreigners persist in and around a center of Tibetan culture in Gansu Province. While roads into Tibetan areas of Qinghai Province are open and free of the police checkpoints that had blocked EmbOffs and foreign journalists from visiting three months ago, PolOffs observed a large, conspicuous military and police presence throughout the Amdo Tibetan region, which spans parts of Qinghai and Gansu Provinces. Enforcement of restrictions appears uneven, and PolOffs were able to make a daylight visit to a major monastery complex in Gansu that was reportedly closed to foreigners. END SUMMARY.

Travel Restrictions Still in Place

[1](#)2. (C) PolOffs traveled to Tongren (Repkong in Tibetan) in the Huangnan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Qinghai Province and Gansu Province's Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture July 1-3. The roads into Huangnan Prefecture were open and free of the police checkpoints that had blocked EmbOffs and foreign journalists from visiting three months earlier (ref A). However, on the road from Huangnan to Xiahe County (Labrang in Tibetan) in Gansu Province, home to the Labrang Monastery and a spiritual center for the Amdo region, a Xiahe-based taxi driver informed PolOffs that foreigners are currently being refused entry into Xiahe. Labrang was the site of alleged violence and unrest in March and also where a group of Tibetan monks interrupted a government-led tour of foreign journalists on April 9 (ref B, C). The driver reported that four British tourists had been forced to disembark from a passenger bus at a police checkpoint the previous day and return to Tongren. Calls to a travel company and hotel operator in Xiahe as well as to the Xiahe Public Security Bureau (PSB) confirmed that Xiahe was closed to foreigners.

[1](#)3. (C) Although a hotel manager in nearby Hezuo City (Gansu Province) claimed that Xiahe would remain closed until July 20, PolOffs were able to purchase public bus tickets to Xiahe at the Hezuo station. Passing through a joint People's Armed Police (PAP) and PSB checkpoint before entering Xiahe, a PAP officer boarded the bus, and, after a cursory inspection of one PolOff's passport, allowed PolOffs to continue into town. As PolOffs left Xiahe via the same road later that day, the same PAP officer again boarded the bus, only asking to see

PolOffs' identification documents, which were again given only a cursory inspection. The bus driver told PolOffs later that the officer told him no foreigners were allowed to spend the night in Xiahe.

¶4. (C) A back entrance to Xiahe's Labrang Monastery, which opened into a residential neighborhood on the outskirts of the complex, was open and unmonitored. As PolOffs approached the larger prayer halls that sit closer to the main tourist entrance, two ethnic Han tourists from Beijing warned that foreigners were prohibited from entering the monastery. According to the tourists, police patrolling the monastery grounds had initially mistaken them for Koreans and told them no foreigners were allowed inside the monastery. The police declined to give the Chinese tourists a reason for the restriction.

Heavy Security Presence in Xiahe, Elsewhere

¶5. (C) PolOffs witnessed three forty-soldier PAP foot patrols marching down the town's main thoroughfare. Soldiers in the first patrol carried nightsticks only, while the second group was armed with rifles and the third with nightsticks and clear riot shields. In Hezuo, a city south of Xiahe which reportedly also saw a share of the violence in Gansu's Gannan Prefecture in March, there appeared to be no restrictions on foreign travel (ref D). However, in the evening PolOffs observed at least two passes of a four-car police patrol cruising slowly through the city as well as foot patrols of PAP and PSB officers with nightsticks. In Jianzha County,

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Qinghai, PolOffs saw foot patrols of about ten PAP officers per group, and witnessed a performance in the city square celebrating the 87th anniversary of the founding of the CCP. The seating area was entirely occupied by PAP soldiers while Tibetan residents stood around the edges of the square.
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